

Week Ending Friday, February 29, 2008

The President's Radio Address

February 23, 2008

Good morning. This Thursday, Laura and I returned from an inspiring visit to Africa. In Benin and Tanzania, we met leaders who are fighting HIV/AIDS and malaria and people whose lives have been saved by the generosity of the American people. In Rwanda, we saw a nation overcoming the pain of genocide with courage and grace and hope. In Ghana, we met entrepreneurs who are exporting their products and building a more prosperous future. And in Liberia, we saw a nation that is recovering from civil war, led by the first democratically elected woman President on the continent. Laura and I returned to Washington impressed by the energy, optimism, and potential of the African people.

Members of Congress will soon be returning to Washington as well, and they have urgent business to attend to. They left town on a 10-day recess without passing vital legislation giving our intelligence professionals the tools they need to quickly and effectively monitor foreign terrorist communications. Congress's failure to pass this legislation was irresponsible. It will leave our Nation increasingly vulnerable to attack, and Congress must fix this damage to our national security immediately.

The way ahead is clear. The Senate has already passed a good bill by an overwhelming bipartisan majority. This bill has strong bipartisan support in the House of Representatives and would pass if given an up-or-down vote. But House leaders are blocking this legislation, and the reason can be summed up in three words: class-action lawsuits.

The Senate bill would prevent plaintiffs' attorneys from suing companies believed to have helped defend America after the 9/11 attacks. More than 40 of these lawsuits have been filed, seeking hundreds of billions of

dollars in damages from these companies. It is unfair and unjust to threaten these companies with financial ruin only because they are believed to have done the right thing and helped their country.

But the highest cost of all is to our national security. Without protection from lawsuits, private companies will be increasingly unwilling to take the risk of helping us with vital intelligence activities. After the Congress failed to act last week, one telecommunications company executive was asked by the Wall Street Journal how his company would respond to a request for help. He answered that because of the threat of lawsuits, quote, "I'm not doing it. I'm not going to do something voluntarily." In other words, the House's refusal to act is undermining our ability to get cooperation from private companies, and that undermines our efforts to protect us from terrorist attack.

Director of National Intelligence Mike McConnell recently explained that the vast majority of the communications infrastructure we rely on in the United States is owned and operated by the private sector. Because of the failure to provide liability protection, he says, private companies who have "willingly helped us in the past are now saying, 'You can't protect me. Why should I help you?'" Senator Jay Rockefeller, the Democratic chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee, puts it this way: "The fact is, if we lose cooperation from these or other private companies, our national security will suffer."

When Congress reconvenes on Monday, Members of the House have a choice to make: They can empower the trial bar, or they can empower the intelligence community. They can help class-action trial lawyers sue for billions of dollars, or they can help our intelligence officials protect millions of lives. They can put our national security in the hands of plaintiffs' lawyers, or they can

entrust it to the men and women of our Government who work day and night to keep us safe.

As they make their choice, Members of Congress must never forget: Somewhere in the world, at this very moment, terrorists are planning the next attack on America. And to protect America from such attacks, we must protect our telecommunications companies from abusive lawsuits.

Thank you for listening.

NOTE: The address was recorded at 10 a.m. on February 22 in the Cabinet Room at the White House for broadcast at 10:06 a.m. on February 23. The transcript was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on February 22 but was embargoed for release until the broadcast. In his address, the President referred to President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf of Liberia. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of this address.

Remarks at a Dinner for the National Governors Association Conference

February 24, 2008

Good evening. Laura and I are honored to have you here, and it's a pleasure to be here with a lot of friends. You know, I've developed a unique perspective on this event. For 6 years, I sat and watched the President speak; for 8 years, I was the President and spoke. [Laughter] And next year, I'll be watching on C-SPAN. [Laughter]

I appreciate Tim Pawlenty and Ed Rendell, who serve as the chair and vice chair of the National Governors Association. I congratulate our two newest Governors, Kentucky's Steve Beshear and Louisiana's Bobby Jindal. I might add, Jindal is not here, but he's ably represented by the first lady of Louisiana, Supriya. And I congratulate Governor Haley Barbour of Mississippi for his reelection. I want to thank the Vice President and Lynne Cheney for joining us. I also tell you how thankful I am and honored we are that Vince Gill and Amy Grant have come tonight to entertain us.

I value our Governors because our Governors are some of the Nation's foremost policy entrepreneurs. I appreciate what you do.

I appreciate the sacrifice your families have made to serve America.

It was in that spirit that Teddy Roosevelt hosted the first Governors meeting here at the White House 100 years ago. I can't imagine what they were thinking about what America would look like 100 years ago, and I'm not sure what people will think 100 years from now. But I do know it makes sense to put wise policy in place in the meantime so America can remain prosperous and strong and free.

And so tonight it's my honor to welcome you all and to offer a toast to the Nation's Governors.

NOTE: The President spoke at 7:30 p.m. in the State Dining Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Gov. Tim Pawlenty of Minnesota; Gov. Edward G. Rendell of Pennsylvania; and entertainers Vince Gill and Amy Grant.

Remarks During a Meeting With the National Governors Association Conference

February 25, 2008

The President. Thank you very much. I'm supposed to stall to wait for the press corps. [Laughter] Chairman, thanks. Let me see your book there, will you? That thing right there, yes. Mr. Vice Chairman, thank you, sir. Hope you enjoyed last night.

Governor Edward G. Rendell of Pennsylvania. Yes, it was great.

The President. It was great, yes. It was fun. I am proud to announce to you that Janet Creighton is running the Intergovernmental Affairs Office for us. She looks forward to working with you. I look forward to hearing from you. There's a lot we can do to—for the next 10 months to work together. I like to tell people, you know, I'm going to finish strong, and I want to work with you as I do so.

A couple of areas I want to talk about, then I'll answer a couple of questions. And then evidently, we're going to have a 100th anniversary picture.

We share a responsibility to protect our country. I get briefed every morning about threats we face, and they're real. Now—and therefore, the question is, what do you do